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CHAPTER

Musical Culture under Mughal Patronage: The Place of Pleasure

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Abstract

This chapter theorizes the place of Hindustani music in Mughal thought and social life, from the last decades of Akbar's reign until the death of Aurangzeb 'Alamgir I (1707). Mughal understandings of the human being, and thus of the social and political worlds, were dominated by two parallel binaries deriving from Persianate discourse on ethics and proper governance: the inner struggle between reason and the emotions anger and desire; and the outer struggle between duty and pleasure. For virtue to prevail, reason and duty must ultimately master desire and pleasure. This mastery had to be displayed to the world if it were to be deemed a virtue at all. Hindustani music was understood in Mughal writings as the sonic vehicle of the emotions joy, love, and longing, which belonged to the domain of desire. Musical patronage and connoisseurship therefore became a major social and political arena in which the inner struggle to place desire under rational control could be outwardly manifested. Patronage and connoisseurship of music, recited poetry, dance, youthful beauty, and other ephemeral phenomena were the core practices of the domain of pleasure in the Mughal world, conducted largely within the intimate social institution of the *majlis* or *mehfil* (assembly). Listening to music in the *majlis* could be dangerous for Mughal men because of its exploration of desire, but music was simultaneously indispensable to Mughal courtiers because of its use value in fortifying the primary Mughal virtue of male-to-male affection and as a cure for physical and mental disease.

Keywords: music, listening, pleasure, connoisseurship, governance, medicine, astrology, emotions history

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Introduction

The core practices and contours of the Hindustani classical music system as we know it today were largely consolidated under Mughal and elite-provincial patronage between the reigns of Akbar I (1556–1605) and Akbar II (1806–1837). Hindustani music's roots and some of its forms are, of course, substantially older than this. Written treatises on Indian music in Sanskrit (*sangita-shastra*) date back well over a millennium before the arrival of Babur's armies on the plains of Hindustan, and in Persian they date to as early as 1375.[1] Elite songs in *rag* and *tal* (theoretically systematized and aestheticized melodic modes and rhythmic cycles) had become the preferred taste of Turkic as well as Hindu rulers across north India and the Deccan within a century of the Slave Dynasty's conquest of Delhi in 1206.[2] In contrast, the first two Mughal emperors showed little interest in Hindustani musical forms—Babur was emperor of Hindustan for only five years, and Humayun spent most of his reign in Iranian exile. Thereafter, Mughal taste became geographically expansive: from Akbar's stables of musicians from Mashhad, Herat, and Gwalior to Jahangir's penchant for Timurid court songs; and from Aurangzeb 'Alamgir I's love of the Hindustani *pakhawaj* to his father's patronage of the maestro Shauqi, who struck Persian *maqam*s and Hindustani *rag*s from his West Asian *tambur* with equal finesse. But from the last half of Akbar's reign, it was increasingly the elite, theorized forms of Hindustani music—privileged in provincial courts from Kashmir to Arakan and Kathmandu to Bijapur—that engaged the Mughals' attention.

These forms were principally the *rag*s themselves,[3] and a set of virtuosic song genres in *rag* and *tal* composed in courtly registers of north Indian languages—*dhrupad*, *khayal*, *tappa*, *thumri*, *ghazal*, *tarana*, and instrumental forms on the *rudra vina*, *rabab*, *pakhawaj*, *sarangi*, *tambur*, and from the eighteenth century, *sitar*, *tabla*, and *sarod*.[4] As is still the case, except on grand occasions, these forms were performed as intimate chamber music by small professional ensembles comprising one or two singers and accompanying instrumentalists (Figure 1); women and transfeminine performers also danced.[5] Beginning in Akbar's court, these forms and their performance practices became the closely guarded intellectual property of multigenerational guilds built around households of male hereditary professional musicians from the *kalawant*, *qawwal* and *dhadhi* communities, and their disciples, who included the highest-status female courtesans (*luli*, *kanchani*);[6] after 1857 such lineage guilds became known by their current appellation, *gharana*.[7] By the time the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, ascended the throne, the discrete set of practices that still constitute the core repertoire and traditions of Hindustani music today had coalesced under Mughal patronage.[8] This makes the Mughal period critical in the history of Hindustani music.

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Figure 1. Three *kalawant*s—two singers and a *rudra vina* player—accompanied by a *pakhawaj* player. Mughal, early 18C. The David Collection, Copenhagen, D 11/1994. © Pernille Klemp/The David Collection.

Rich Persian-language sources on sound, listening, and music point to the patrons for Hindustani music, and its place in the thought and social life of Mughal listeners at the empire's height, circa 1593–1707. That we know so much about Hindustani music in this period itself testifies to the fundamental importance of musical patronage to the Mughal state, and to the elites who helped run it and sustain its power. Indeed, music is by far the best documented of all the arts and sciences cultivated in Mughal India. Hundreds of individual works on music from the Mughal period are still extant, in Sanskrit, in the north Indian vernaculars, and especially in Persian. Particularly significant for this discussion is the most important cluster of Mughal treatises on Hindustani music: those written in Persian during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658–1707) with an explicitly canonizing intent.

The Place of Pleasure in the Mughal World

Music in the Mughal world was fundamentally wrapped up with ideas about pleasure, and its place in the lives of elite listeners. Mughal understandings of the human being, and thereby of the social and political worlds, were dominated by two binaries deriving from the Persianate discourse on ethics and governance. These were, firstly, the inner struggle between reason and the emotions of anger and desire, and secondly, an outer struggle between the domain of duty and that of pleasure. For virtue to prevail, reason and duty must ultimately subdue desire and pleasure. This victory did not entail the annihilation of desire and pleasure, but rather, mastery over these domains. Such mastery had to be displayed to the world if it were to be deemed a virtue at all.

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The domain of pleasure therefore had an essential place and role to play in the inward and outward maintenance of Mughal power. The Mughals' successors, the British, utterly misunderstood the serious purpose of pleasure in the life of the Mughal court, with profound implications for Mughal historiography.[9] Mughal historians themselves sometimes used the rhetorical topos of an excessive devotion to pleasure to signify a threat to the political order, which colonial historians conveniently misread as a literal statement. But the colonizers principally deployed the slur of decadence to present British rule as a welcome relief to the Indian people; Elliott viciously denounced all Muslim rulers down to his own time (1849) as "sunk in sloth and debauchery, and emulating the vices of a Caligula or a Commodus."[10]

From a Mughal perspective, however, duty was not possible without a circumscribed time and space for pleasure, and pleasure was thus a serious business, subject to scientific rationalization. Patronage and connoisseurship of music, recited poetry, dance, and other such ephemeral things were the core practices of the domain of pleasure in the Mughal world, and took place largely within the highly scripted, intimate social institution of the *majlis* or *mehfil*.[11] Music had a particularly important role to play. Hindustani music was understood in Mughal writings as the sonic vehicle of the emotions of joy, love, and longing, all of which belonged to the domain of desire. As importantly, music's powers were construed as having a rational basis in mathematics, the purest of the Islamicate exact sciences. Specifically, music was considered a direct channel of astral power over terrestrial affairs. Musical patronage and connoisseurship thus became a major social and political arena in which the inner struggle to place desire under rational control could be outwardly performed, and musical sound was an indispensable agent in this effort.

Important here is the idea of aesthetic sensibility—that is, one's emotional response to an object of art or beauty. Listening to music in the *majlis* could still be dangerous because it played with the power of desire. However, by setting aside a defined place in Mughal life for artistic patronage and by controlling the emotional effects of art through the exertion of rationality, Mughal men could cultivate and experience the finer sensibilities. An elite man's temperament could be restored through musical listening to the inner equilibrium required to carry out his worldly duties effectively. This theory of internal individual temperament and its external workings in imperial service and artistic patronage was underpinned by wider Islamicate understandings of the nature of the physical body, the five senses, and their relationship to emotional temperament.

Pleasure and (Self-)Government from Akbar to Aurangzeb

Consider this pair of descriptions concerning the two emperors who bookend this period. Both are from authorized accounts. The first was written by Abu'l Fazl circa 1593 about the emperor Akbar:

> His Majesty pays much attention to music, and is the patron of all who practise this enchanting art (*jadu*). There are numerous musicians at court, Hindus, Iranis, Turanis, Kashmiris, both men and women. The court musicians are arranged in seven divisions, one for each day in the week. When his Majesty gives the order, they let the wine of harmony flow, and thus increase intoxication in some, and sobriety in others.[12]

The second anecdote, written around 1684, concerns the emperor Aurangzeb:

> Though he has collected at the foot of his [throne] … singers who possess lovely voices and clever instrumental performers, and in the commencement of his reign … used to hear them sing and play, and though he himself understands music well, yet now for several years past, on account of his great restraint and self-denial … he entirely abstains from this amusement … Mirza Mukarram Khan Safavi, who was an expert in the musical art, once said to His Majesty "What is your Majesty's view of

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> music?" The Emperor answered (in Arabic) "It is *mubah* [permissible], neither good nor bad." The Khan asked, "Then what kind of it is in your opinion most worthy to be heard?" The Emperor replied, "I cannot listen to music without [*mazamir*, instruments] especially *pakhawaj*, but [instruments are] unanimously prohibited (*haram*); so I have left off hearing singing too."[13]

Traditionally, these two statements have been read as evidence of Akbar's love of music and enthusiastic patronage of different cultures and of Aurangzeb's hatred of music and his cultural narrowmindedness. They have, then, been read in terms of the two emperors' contrasting cultural policies.[14]

Such a reading may indeed be appropriate in the case of Akbar. Particularly important is work that highlights the centrality of Persian literature on ethics (*akhlaq*) in Abu'l Fazl's construction of Akbar as ideal man and emperor. Nasiruddin Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* (1235) and Jalaluddin Dawwani's *Akhlaq-i Jalali* (ca. 1453–1478) were integral to the construction of the epitome of Mughal statecraft, Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari* of circa 1593.[15] Indeed, Abu'l Fazl placed himself in Dawwani's lineage of disciples and famously used the emperor's body and his balanced temperament as a homology for imperial state and household in the opening chapter of the *A'in-i Akbari*.[16] "A king," he wrote,

> is ... the origin of stability and possession .... [The emperor] puts the *reins of desire* into the *hands of reason*; in the wide field of his desires he does not permit himself to be trodden down ... He makes *wrath*, the tyrant, pay homage to *wisdom*, so that blind rage may not get the upper hand ... He is continually attentive to the *health of the body politic*, and applies remedies to the several diseases thereof. And in the same manner that the *equilibrium of the animal constitution* depends upon an *equal mixture of the elements*, so also does the political constitution become well tempered by a proper division of ranks; and by means of the *warmth of the ray of unanimity and concord*, a multitude of people become fused into one body.[17]

Abu'l Fazl repeatedly explored the many ways in which Akbar was the supreme example of Mughal manhood, the *insan-i kamil*, on which all other men should model themselves.

But the individual-to-state homology falls apart under Aurangzeb, certainly in relation to music. For, despite his reputation as being more rigidly proscriptive than Akbar, and despite his personal renunciation of music circa 1668, Aurangzeb did not ban music. Far from it: Aurangzeb was known widely in his time as a most knowledgeable and dedicated connoisseur of Hindustani music—he certainly knew much more about it than Akbar—and until his death in 1707 he continued to allow his sons and the nobility to patronize art music unhindered.[18] If the emperor could renounce his role as cultural arbiter, as Shah Jahan and Muhammad Shah also did at times, the question then becomes—whence at such times did Mughal officials derive their models of ethical leadership in this arena?

After Abu'l Fazl, influential advisers such as Chandrabhan Brahman (d. 1673) did not overtly prescribe the study of regnal histories as part of the ethical training of Mughal men, but rather, the aforementioned works on ethics, *Akhlaq-i Jalali* and *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*. At this time the specific model of the emperor was less important in an elite man's self-fashioning than these more generic and widely available discourses on manhood. This became obvious in Aurangzeb's reign when the emperor largely withdrew from public participation in the cultural sphere, leaving the Mughal nobility to carry on without his presence as the model of behavior. In other words, it was the *discourse* that set the pattern for modeling, not the emperor. Therefore, the responses of Akbar and Aurangzeb to music should be read, not as homologies of radically opposed cultural policies, but as two different—and equally legitimate—responses to the absolute requirement for a man, and most particularly the ruler, to maintain moral, mental, and physical equilibrium between competing internal powers. Together, these anecdotes lay bare the two nested sets of opposites that were counterpoised against each other in the moral and ethical systems of the Mughal empire—reason versus desire/anger, and duty versus pleasure/sport.

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The Mind and the Body of the Mughal Patron

The opening passage of the *A'in-i Akbari* can also thus be used to show how *akhlaqi* theories about the self in action in the world could be personalized and activated in individual Mughal men. Abu'l Fazl's rhetorical flourishes concerning the emperor's *reining in* of his own *desires* and *anger* through *reason* and *wisdom*, and his creation of *equilibrium* and *harmony* in the *body politic* through the *light* of his *justice*, come from the *akhlaqi* theory of mind in relation to the body. According to the *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, two interlocking aspects created the human self—the disposition of the mind, and the humoral constitution of the body. Both aspects needed to be held in balance for the self to act virtuously in the world.

For Dawwani, the mind has two powers: the power of comprehension or perception (*quwwat-i idrak*) and the power of incitement (*quwwat-i tahrik*). The perceptive power incorporates the contemplative or observing intellect (*aql-i nazari*) and the practical or active intellect (*aql-i amali*), which, through reason and rational decision, enables the self to adopt right courses of action. The power of incitement incorporates the power of anger (*quwwat-i ghazabi*), which repels disagreeable things, and the power of desire (*quwwat-i shahwi*), which is drawn to agreeable things. By contrast, reason (*nafs-i natiqa*) is construed as the superior power that distinguishes men and angels from beasts: "the ruling and serene spirit—the source of thought, judgment, and the desire to discern the truth of things."[19]

Thus, for good to prevail, the powers of incitement must be reined in by the power of reason. Under the regulating control of reason, the powers of anger and desire can be transformed into virtues: if anger is cultivated rationally, it becomes courage (*shuja'at*); and desire, temperance (*affat*). Likewise, from the cultivation and exercise of the contemplative intellect comes wisdom (*hikmat*). But it is the practical intellect that is the engine of equity or justice (*'adalat*), and *'adalat* is the paramount of the four cardinal virtues. The job of the practical intellect is to regulate the other three powers, bringing them into harmonious balance and perfecting them as virtues. Unrestrained by reason, courage slips from the virtuous mean and gives way to foolhardiness or cowardice; and temperance, to greed or apathy. Without active judgment constantly ensuring the maintenance of equilibrium, the whole system—individual body, or body politic—collapses into vice and destruction.[20]

The paramountcy of equilibrium is also central to the fundamental theory of the Greco-Islamicate natural sciences that all things, including human physiology, are constituted of four elements—fire (*atish*), water (*ab*), air (*hawa*), and earth (*khak*). These must be kept in equilibrium (*i'tidal*) to ensure natural harmony. Justice, '*adalat*, and equilibrium, *i'tidal*, have the same root, which Dawwani explicitly correlates, the first being responsible for mental health, the second for physical health. The powers of anger and desire could also be animated by a humoral imbalance, anger being caused by an excess of yellow bile, and desire by an excess of blood. Thus someone with a predisposition toward biliousness would have a more difficult time in using his rational mind to control the power of anger. Conversely, reason could marshal the external forces of humoral remedies—like music—to bring the powers of anger and desire back into appropriate subjection.[21]

Finally, even if one's mental disposition and bodily humors were perfectly regulated, if that remained hidden in the internal realm, the powers could not be rendered virtuous. Anger and desire could only become courage and temperance through *action in social relationships with others*—that is, through outward exertion in the world. The internal struggle between reason and desire thus had to be manifested externally in the domains of duty and pleasure. Moreover, the perfection of the virtues required social reciprocity. According to Dawwani, "The perfection of the individual man depends on association and agreement; and without affectionate love (*mahabbat*) and like-minded friendship (*ulfat*) this cannot come into being." In other words, one's self-perfection, one's attainment of '*adalat*, was only possible through the assistance of friends joined to oneself by bonds of affectionate love. Indeed, Dawwani goes on to say that where there is true affection, the need for equity evaporates, making affectionate love a superior virtue even to justice.[22]

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Revealingly, affectionate love was one of the chief outworkings of temperance, the primary virtue wrought from desire, and Dawwani considered the passionate love of human souls, *'ishq-i nafsani*, to be one of desire's key virtues.[23] It should therefore be no surprise that the principal social arena in which friendship, affection, and love between Mughal men was nurtured was within the domain of pleasure—the primary domain centered upon the cultivation and control of desirable things.

Connoisseurship, Friendship, and a Time and Space for Pleasure: The Musical *Majlis*

This brings us to connoisseurship, and the social spaces in which the internal struggle for balance in relation to desire was displayed to the world. Connoisseurship, the province of the *ahl-i zauq* or *rasika*—the one who tastes aesthetic pleasures and emotional essences (*rasa*) through a variety of sensory experiences—is an ideal arena in which to examine how Mughal men controlled desire publicly and reciprocally. This is particularly so of musical connoisseurship, because music was perceived to mediate the pains and delights of human love, the most difficult desire to control. It is also because Hindustani music was and still is designed to be at its best when performed in intimate spaces to a small group of aficionados, and because highly developed theories of reception and audience connoisseurship are central to its successful performance.[24]

The time and space dedicated to connoisseurship in Mughal India, and particularly to the patronage of musicians and reciters of poetry, was the *majlis* ("assembly," pl. *majalis*). This was a highly scripted institution whose boundaries, values, transgressions, and delights were widely recorded in Mughal painting, poetry, and biographies or *tazkira*s (which were often conceived as fantasy *majalis*). The *majlis* was recollected after 1857 through a haze of nostalgia in novels and films and survives in altered forms today as the musical *mehfil* and the poetical *musha'ira*. I will use Andrews's and Kalpaklı's very useful notion of scripting, pertaining to the Ottoman *meclis*, to help us read through representations of the Mughal *majlis* for traces of the fleeting sensory and emotional experiences that patrons of music sought and tasted. The highly stereotypical, rhetorical ways in which the live *majlis* was pinned down in different media—its scripting—do not entirely place its lived experience beyond reach. Rather, the script was in constant dialogue with, *and was inserted into*, the repeated experiences of live *majalis* that Mughal and Rajput men enjoyed over their lifetimes as connoisseurs. Critically, the script replicates that back-and-forth. Through repetition that is never entirely identical, the script lingers on and deepens our understanding of those sensual and emotional qualities most valued by Mughal-era connoisseurs. But most importantly, its replication and constant repetition, across various art forms and recollections, shaped elite men's expectations of the musical *majlis* and taught them how to experience it. The script taught them how this temporary assemblage of sensory, emotional, and social stimuli should *feel*.[25]

It is worth considering some instances of this script across media and forms from the seventeenth century: two examples of the genre painting the "convivial gathering" circa 1600–1605, considered to be portraits respectively of Akbar (Figure 3) and his son Salim, later Jahangir (Figure 2); an entry in Shaikh Farid Bhakkari's *tazkira* of Mughal officials (1649–1650); an extract from the collection of tales the *Bahar-i Danish* (1651); and verses by the Brajbhasha poet Vrind (1691). Produced over nearly a century, these representations of connoisseur-patrons and the *majlis* demonstrate several continuities in elite social and cultural ideals. Indeed, there are hundreds of examples that express similar ideas about the pursuits and character traits that were valued in elite men.

Shaikh Farid Bhakkari, an official in Shah Jahan's service, described Husamuddin Khan as

> well-known for his efficiency, understanding, learning and perception[;] he is famous in the world for bravery, courage and deliberation too. He is a well-spoken young man and has great physical strength … he is well-versed in each (branch of) knowledge through his very frequent intercourse with learned

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> men … His calligraphic writing … is more manifest than the sun … In the art of music, he is second to Khwaja Aquil and is without an equal in [the] extempore composition [of poetry], witticism and eloquence. Few will be found so [fond] of hunting as he. He is [unique in] the world in cherishing friends. The writer of this compendium, Shaikh Farid, is under obligation to him.[26]

Vrind's poetical description of his Mughal patron fifty years later couches his praise in Indic terms, rather than Persianate ones, but it highlights strikingly similar qualities:

> He is handsome, steadfast, valiant, and skilled with a bow.
>
> Generous, knowledgeable, an enjoyer, extremely generous in spirit,
>
> Mirza Qadiri is the jewel of his family,
>
> Clever with emotion, experiencing delight.
>
> A connoisseur (*rasika*), he understands matters of sentiment,
>
> And pursues love wholeheartedly.
>
> He longs night and day for music and pleasure.[27]

Divided between skill in the arts of war and connoisseurship of the arts of pleasure, a number of things are valued here. The cultivation of courtly manners, elegant speech, knowledge, and understanding stemmed from the virtue of wisdom. Physical strength, steadfastness, bravery, and skill in the hunt and with the bow displayed the virtue of courage. Expertise in poetry, calligraphy, music, and witticism; generosity and the ability to taste pleasure and the emotions; and the knowledgeable patronage of poets, painters, and musicians—all of these were outworkings of the virtue of temperance. From other such records, to poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music we can add expertise in the arcana of perfume, flowers, food, precious stones and metals, fine textiles, and youthful male beauty.

These objects of connoisseurship appear widely in the genre of painting often called "the convivial gathering" as symbols of the cultivated man, the ideal prince (Figures 2 and 3). Mughal painting of this period was iconic: what was valued was not unfettered novelty, but the virtuosity with which a painter rendered and combined traditional compositions, themes, and symbols. The composition of both paintings is very close. Events take place beneath the open sky in a semi-formal garden part-overgrown with lush greenery and wildflowers, its waterways and fountains a haven for mating pairs of deer and ducks. The central and socially most elevated figure, the patron, is seated under a canopy on a platform or chair placed on an exquisitely detailed carpet, its floral designs drawing the garden into the interior space. On the far right, a servant holds the patron's sword, wrapped in red cloth—a symbol of his status and duty, for the moment held in abeyance. The patron's attention is captured by a beautiful younger man, with whom he shares the intimacy of commensality— a shared wine cup, a delicacy offered, an embrace. In the painting of Salim (Figure 2), a young poet holds his book ready to recite from it; in both, musicians suffuse the scene with melody. It is worth noting that Salim's musicians are Hindustani *kalawants* singing *dhrupad* accompanied by the *rudra vina*, while Akbar's (Figure 3) play the Persian spike-fiddle (*ghichak*) and end-blown flute (*nay*)—details may be changed according to the artist's fancy and intent, but the sound of music must ever fill the painted world.

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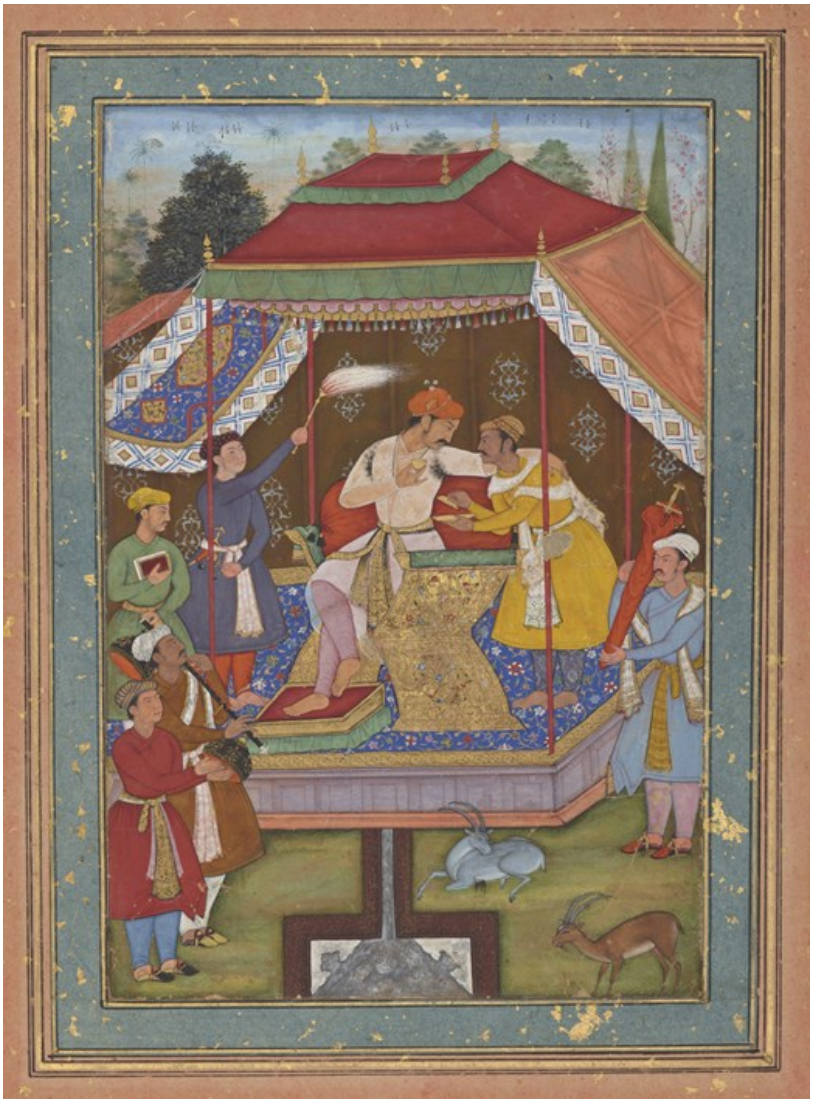

Figure 2. "A Royal Entertainment." Painting of Mughal Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir) by Sur Das, ca. 1600. © Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1960.27.

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Figure 3. "Interior of a Courtyard with Figures." Painting resembling Mughal Emperor Akbar, possibly painted for Prince Salim, ca. 1600–1604. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: Rogers Fund, 1908, 08.124.2. Public Domain.

Music, wine, poetry, and beautiful young men turn out to be the objects of connoisseurship par excellence in Mughal-era texts and paintings and were often enjoyed together in the *majlis*. Such a gathering is described thus in the *Bahar-i Danish*:

> The shouts of pleasure and rejoicing reached the extremities of the globe. The wine of gladness sparkled in the goblet of congratulation, and the sprightly melody of lively airs from the lute [*tambur*] eased the mind of care. In every apartment they strewed a variety of flowers and sweet-scented herbs and mixed together whole bags of the musk of Azfir and essences of ambergris, to regale the senses of the joyous assembly. Fascinating vocal performers … chanted mirthful strains, and magic-sounding musicians, like Venus, drew forth the notes of delight. Jasmine-faced cupbearers, with ruby-colored wine, gave zest and brilliancy to the assemblage of pleasure, and smiling flower [bearers] with their varied attitudes drew the hearts of beholders into the snares of their [tangled] tresses.[28]

Wine, music, fresh flowers, perfume, youthful beauty, and the promise of physical pleasures to come—they may be stereotypical, but as script they signify joy, delight, love, and desire, leading to ecstatic fulfillment in the transient moment. How?

Following philosophers such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), Mughal writers viewed wine, music, perfume, beauty, and physical union as the manifestation of the power of desire as it pertained to the five senses: taste, hearing, smell, sight, and touch. In the words of Abu'l Fazl, the magical (*nairangi*, *jadu*) power of music caused

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> the beautiful creatures of the harem of the heart to shine forth on the tongue … The melodies then enter through the window of the ear and return to their former seat, the heart, bringing with them thousands of presents. The hearers, according to their insight, are moved to sorrow or to joy. Music is thus of use to those who have renounced the world and to such as still cling to it.[29]

Music was thus a direct vehicle of human and divine beauty, desire, love, longing, and sorrow to the listener, having unmediated access to his soul and the power to transform his emotional state, generally to beneficial effect (*ta'sir* or *asar*). The words used most commonly in Mughal-era literature for music's effects are those for pleasure and delight: *hazz*, *khush*, *sorur*, *zauq*, *shauq*, *lazzat*, *nishat*, *nimat*, *dilchasp*, *dilruba* etc; or those for sorrow, pain, and separation: especially, *hazin*, *dard*, and *firaq*. To preeminent seventeenth-century music connoisseur Faqirullah, the arousal of tender sympathy (*riqqat*) in the heart was both what music is—its very essence (*lazzat*, also "pleasure," "flavor")—and what it produced in listeners (*ma-hasal*). And the job of musicians in the *majlis* was to steal hearts, or to wound them.[30]

What is most interesting, though, about these scripted, sensory objects of desire is that all of them are *perishable*; the beauty of poetry was much more in the sound of its recitation than in its calligraphic form. These objects' principal beauty and worthiness of connoisseurship lay in their *experience* in the moment, in the tasting of their intense but fleeting sensory and emotional flavor. Indeed, their momentary presence in the world heightens and draws attention to the primary emotion the *majlis* was designed to explore: the poignancy of transience—the double-edged sword of delight in love found and grief in its inevitable loss.

But the other great Mughal value on display in these depictions is affection—the value of male friendship. The phrase Bhakkari uses repeatedly in his praise of commendable men is "he was known for cherishing friends." In perusing the biographical literature it becomes clear that in the Mughal world, connoisseurship of the arts, crafts, and sensual experiences was inseparable from a highly cultivated ethic of male friendship that went way beyond conviviality. In a volatile political situation there were few bonds that guaranteed loyalty. Ideally, the ties of kinship should do that; but historical chronicles show that biological, milk, and marital bonds were regularly betrayed. More steadfast and revered than any of these bonds was the friendship of a trusted companion.

Legendary friendships such as that of Mahmud of Ghazni and his slave Ayaz were held up in poetry as the ideal of Mughal relationships. Other less-exalted relationships were celebrated in *tazkira*s, such as the mutual devotion of Faqirullah and the famous poet Nasir 'Ali.[31] Such intense friendships were common between Mughal men of similar status. The *mahabbat* or *dosti* between two men was regarded as the most powerful human bond, because it was *chosen* on the basis of spiritual sympathy and shared interests. Babur's cousin Mirza Haider, in explaining why he rejected the duty of a closer blood tie to fight for Humayun in 1540, wrote:

> Now the Emperor [Humayun] and myself had become friends, after the Moghul fashion, and he had given me the name of *dust* [friend]. In council he never addressed me by any other name … No one of my brothers, or the Sultáns of the time, who had been in the Emperor's service, had ever been honored in such a way as was I, Muhammad Haidar Kurkán, who being the approved friend of such a prince as the Emperor, was called not merely "brother" but was chosen as *dust*.[32]

In music, intimate friendship and connoisseurship went hand-in-hand. It is clear from the canonical musical literature of the 1660s–1690s that friendship was central to its production and reception. The primary stated audience for music treatises was the friends of the author, and only secondarily, if at all, performers. Treatises likewise circulated through the wider friendship networks of patron-connoisseurs. With only two known exceptions in this period,[33] all the writers of these texts were *mirza*s of rank in Mughal service. Faqirullah directs his statements consistently toward connoisseurs; that his audience was intended to be fellow travelers of his own class, as opposed to professional musicians, is indicated by the known readership of his musical treatise, the *Rag Darpan* (1666). Speaking of his faulty first draft (ca. 1664), he wrote: "Some of my friends

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(*yaran*) whose entire pleasure (*zauq*) is in music insisted on taking a copy of [the first draft] .... [To] my friends (*dostan*) ... and to all men of discernment (*sahib-i naziri*) [who are in possession of the first draft], an appeal is made to discard it."

In short, the intended audience for his writing was his intimates, and other like-minded patrons. Faqirullah was one of Aurangzeb's top 150 *mansabdar*s, and the likelihood that he pursued friendships with professional Hindustani musicians is remote; professionals all belonged to low-status hereditary *qaum*s that writers explicitly set apart from the *zat-i sharif*, "respectable classes."[34] These musical treatises were written by high-ranking patron-connoisseurs for their intimates and other connoisseurs of elite rank—and thereby comrades in the quest for manly perfection. Indeed, the social context in which this rash of new musical writing appeared maps directly onto real friendship networks that can be traced through contemporaneous *tazkira*s.

So on the one hand, the script for the *majlis* elaborated in these paintings and texts emphasizes the importance of a cultivated appreciation of transient things and sensual experiences, notably music, as key to being a perfected man. On the other, it emphasizes the circles of affection and friendship between men in which this appreciation occurred—more than that, in which friendship was also cultivated and appreciated as a manly virtue. How, then, did the connoisseurship of music work in the *majlis* to control and make virtuous the domain of pleasure, thereby both demonstrating a man's mastery of reason, and reinforcing that most important of Mughal virtues, affection between friends?

Harnessing the Power of Desire: Controlling and Using Music in the *Majlis*

Because music possessed power, and because that power activated desire in the listener, if it was not very carefully controlled, music could unbalance the listener's equilibrium, unleashing his desires and potentially wreaking moral havoc. The *Anwar-i Suhaili* put this destructive potential in the terms of the *akhlaq* literature, using the same horse and rider imagery as Abu'l Fazl used, but this time with music destabilizing the king: "A King had a Musician of a pleasant voice, and a sweet performer, who, by his enchanting melodies bore the foot of reason out of the stirrup, and wrested the reins of self-possession from the hand of patience and endurance."[35] Cautionary tales about courtiers and kings who became so lost in listening to music that they neglected their duties as rulers, and thereby suffered the loss of their lands and even their lives, are so prevalent in Mughal literature as to constitute a standard rhetorical topos.[36]

So carefully did music have to be handled that musicians themselves were considered to be of very dubious status in prescriptive literature, to be separated as far as possible from men of virtue. Dawwani notes that a man should not be friends with someone whose "passion for amusement and diversion, [particularly] listening to music and [the] intimacy [*mu'asharat*] of musicians, interferes with his feeling for a genuine friend; if so, no wish should be entertained for his attachment [*mahabbat*]."[37] It is worth noting that the ethical literature and cautionary tales do not denigrate listening to music per se. Rather, they criticize excessive attachment to music and friendship with musicians, an attitude sometimes even expressed by notorious pleasure-seekers like Dargah Quli Khan, who lavishly documented Delhi's elite *majalis* circa 1740.[38] The attempt to reinforce musicians' low status by shunning friendship with them was paralleled during the *majlis* itself by moves to rein in musicians' sonic powers over elite listeners. Indeed, much of the highly technical knowledge found in treatises on Mughal music might be considered to constitute intellectual controls put in place in the etiquette of connoisseurship to harness the power of music: first to control it, and then to wield it.

The fundamental job of the musician in the *majlis* was "to arouse pleasure and delight in listeners through [both] beauty of voice and the melodies performed." Notably, Mirza Khan particularly commended singers whose voices could "produce contentment (*aram*), pleasure (*lazzat*), and sweet delight (*halawat*) in the heart"

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or "possess[ed] such sorrow (*hazin*) that [the singers'] fingernails scratch the heart and listening to them arouses tender sympathy (*riqqat*)."[39] These effects could only happen, however, if the musician achieved perfection in his or her performance of the Hindustani *rag*s, each one a highly complex melodic formula that, when deployed perfectly at its exact, prescribed time, produces a particular emotional effect (*ta'sir*). What the patron required was *'ilm*, "knowledge": *'ilm-i musiqi*, the music-technical knowledge exclusive to connoisseurs and professional musicians, and *'ilm-i majlis*, the implicit rules of taste and conduct for the musical gathering. All the Aurangzeb-era treatises are presented as repositories of this precise knowledge *for the patron*, so that "listeners who do not know this art can learn from this book, in order that in the musical assembly musicians and others who have the stamp of genius are not put to shame, and the connoisseurs of music do not find fault with them."[40] In other words, so the patron could bring the wild strains of melody under the subjection of the rules of *musiqi* and *majlis*, and thus prove in external action before his peers his ability to place his own desire under rational control.

The onus was on the patron and his listening companions to be in complete control of musical proceedings in the *majlis*. And the '*ilm* they wielded was largely aimed at controlling the power of the base passions over the assembled company, represented either in the person of the performer or in what was performed and how. Patrons themselves should rarely sing lest they be mistaken for professionals. Only unimpeachable musicians from the *qaum*s that enjoyed imperial patronage were supposed to enter the elite *majlis*; performers whose usual domain was the women's quarter, the *bazar*, or the village most certainly were not (or not without scandal).[41] What and how they sang also mattered. It was best to stick to those canonical genres created by the masters of old whose authority was universally recognized. Performers should never make a mistake; every melodic phrase must be strong and sweet, in tune, in time, sung with complete breath control, and thus perfectly create the form of the *rag*. But patrons should also only employ singers with clear and correct pronunciation, intelligence, control, and authority, a calm and modest demeanor, and an open, attractive face. Musicians who sang through gritted teeth or with a mouth so wide you could see down their gullet were abhorrent, as were those who closed their eyes, breathed too often, trembled all over, waved their limbs about, extended and retracted their necks like camels, puffed out their cheeks like pumpkins, strained so hard their forehead and neck veins stood out, or sang with the detestable tone of a crow, an ass, a wild camel, or a she-goat.[42]

But if the patron possessed the *'ilm* of the connoisseur, he could control the musical assembly and bend music's affective powers to his will. Control began with appointing the right musicians: those who had mastered the *'ilm-i majlis* as well as *'ilm-i musiqi*, belonged to an authenticated musical lineage (*tariqa*, *silsila*), had learned from a perfect master (*ustad-i kamil*), and whose singing conformed with the established canons and traditions (*zabita*, *qawanin*). This was the minimum guarantee of proper training and unwavering command over voice, bodily comportment, and full musical materials including *rag*, *tal*, and the ability to compose and perform song genres. The prescriptions for creating a beautiful voice in the *Tuhfat al-Hind* (ca. 1675) are physiologically precise: to create a voice that was strong, creamy, sustained, agile, and clean in all registers and speeds, without distorting face or body, would have required years of practical training and full mastery of vocal technique, breath control, and the extraordinary mental arithmetic required to extemporize melody flawlessly on the spot. Such ingredients produced a near-disembodied performer who was perfectly in control of his or her musical materials, and thus able to act as an unpolluted channel of the power of the *rag*s to the ears of listeners. Once the music was under control, its acknowledged power over the emotions could then be wielded to beneficial effect.

Musical sound was such a potent force in the struggle between reason and emotion because it could, it was believed, deliver *both*. Music was the sonic vehicle of desire; but it was also a key source of *'adalat*, and as such could strengthen the rational mind and generate courage or temperance, or produce equilibrium in the bodily humors. This was because music's powers were rooted in the Greco-Islamicate exact sciences: in astrology, and in the mathematics underpinning musical acoustics, which exact scientists had tied together since Pythagoras.

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Music is what Dawwani used as his primary proof of the scientific basis of *'adalat* and of the theory that the four cardinal virtues are virtuous means between extremes of excess and insufficient exertion of the powers. Right in the middle of the *Akhlaq-i Jalali* is an extended treatise on music theory, which establishes mathematically the Pythagorean acoustical method of tuning the twelve notes of the scale. Because music, alone among the arts, is rationally based in mathematical ratios, the harmonious functioning of musical acoustics was mathematical proof of the scientific basis of equilibrium in general.

To bring balance to the powers of mind, musicians were enjoined to manipulate the parameter of tempo (speed). As was "very clear to people of taste" (*ahl-i mizaq*), fast tempi awakened the powers of desire and anger; whereas slow tempi induced sorrow (*hazin*) or existential states that strengthened the power of inner perception (*nazar*).[43] Hindustani music's most important powers, though, concerned the efficacy of the *rag*s to cure imbalances of the bodily humors. Each *rag* was considered to generate a unique affective essence, or *ras*, capable of arousing specific emotions in the listener. Mughal music theorists explained each *rag*'s emotional essence as resulting from the elemental effects of the seven *swara*s (notes) on the four humors of the listening body. And as Dawwani did in his musical proof of *'adalat*, they argued these powers derived from the movement of the seven celestial bodies through the twelve houses of the zodiac (Figure 4).

In their choice of *rag*s to be performed in the *majlis*, then, patrons and musicians had to be acutely sensitive to the time and atmosphere of the occasion and the temperamental mood of the connoisseurs, deploying *rag*s that would regulate listeners' imbalances and bring their humors back into equilibrium—as Abu'l Fazl put it, ease the cares of worldly duties and restore the faculties.[44] According to Ras Baras Khan, the great-great-grandson of Akbar's famous court musician Tansen and *khalifa* of Aurangzeb's musicians, this was why *rag*s with dominant cold notes should be played at midday to balance out the heat of the day, and why watery *rag*s should be sung in the hot, dry months to precipitate the monsoon rains.[45] Similarly, a melancholic patron could have his cold, dry humor balanced out by listening to *rag*s that emphasized hot and wet notes, restoring his equilibrium and making him fit again to take up sword and pen.[46]

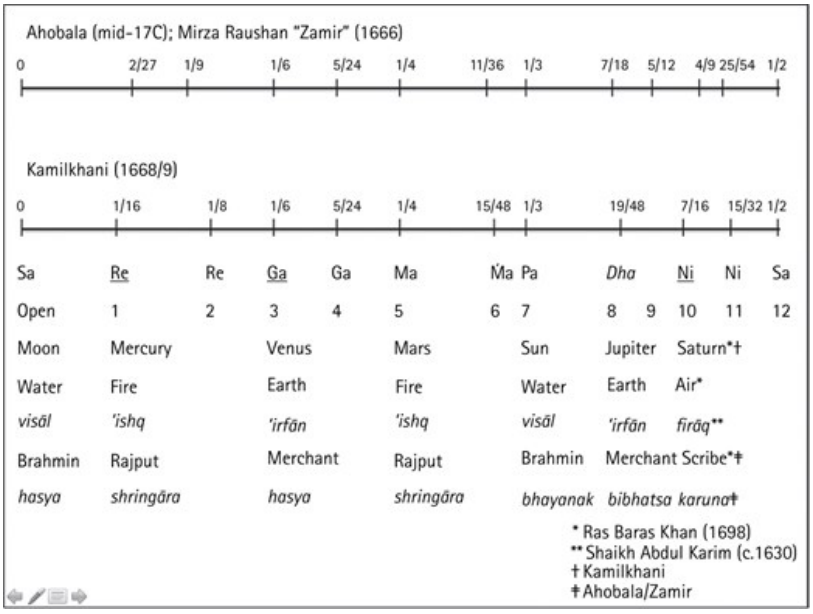
Ahobala (mid-17C); Mirza Raushan "Zamir" (1666)
0 2/27 1/9 1/6 5/24 1/4 11/36 1/3 7/18 5/12 4/9 25/54 1/2
Kamilkhani (1668/9)
0 1/16 1/8 1/6 5/24 1/4 15/48 1/3 19/48 7/16 15/32 1/2
Sa Re Re Ga Ga Ma Ma Pa Dha Ni Ni Sa
Open 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Moon Mercury Venus Mars Sun Jupiter Saturn*†
Water Fire Earth Fire Water Earth Air*
visāl 'ishq 'irfān 'ishq visāl 'irfān firāq**
Brahmin Rajput Merchant Rajput Brahmin Merchant Scribe*‡
hasya shringāra hasya shringāra bhayanak bibhatsa karuna‡
* Ras Baras Khan (1698)
** Shaikh Abdul Karim (c.1630)
† Kamilkhani
‡ Ahobala/Zamir

Figure 4. Correlations made between the tuning of the Hindustani scale using Pythagorean mathematical ratios (7 notes, 12 positions), the celestial bodies, the elements, their emotional effects (in Sufi and *rasa* terms), and the social hierarchy.

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Conclusion: Music and the Political Order

The Mughal *majlis*, and the musical performance and knowledgeable listening that took place within it, was a major public arena in which Mughal patrons performed the inner struggle to place desire under rational control, and music itself was an indispensable and active agent in this effort. But the most critical connection between music and the political order in these texts was the correlation that Ras Baras Khan, Ahobala Pandit, and Mirza Raushan Zamir—respectively, Aurangzeb's chief hereditary musician, a seminal Sanskrit theorist, and a major Mughal connoisseur—made between the seven *swara*s and the social hierarchy of their day. In Ras Baras Khan's orally transmitted system, the fiery notes are Rajputs, the warrior and kingly caste; the watery notes are Brahmans, the scholarly and priestly caste; the airy note represents Kayasths, the scribal caste; and the earthy notes are lower-caste agriculturalists (Figure 4). Strikingly, this is virtually the same correlation that Abu'l Fazl made regarding the four ranks of the Mughal polity: the rulers and nobility are fiery; the scholars and philosophers, watery; the scribes and chancellery, airy; and servants, earthy.

In other words, the theory of equilibrium dictating Hindustani musical performance was identical to the theory of equilibrium underpinning Abu'l Fazl's notion of the body politic. Music, and by extension the entire domain of pleasure and connoisseurship, was thus an essential element in the maintenance of the whole structure of empire— of not only self-governance among affectionate friends but also political governance from the emperor downward. This is the primary reason that music features so prominently as a symbol of auspiciousness and dynastic celebration—from the daily sounding of the *naubat* ensemble to major state occasions like coronations and royal births—in the historical accounts of all the Mughal emperors, including Aurangzeb.[47] Aurangzeb and lesser patrons may sometimes have renounced music personally. But no one could remove music from Mughal life, even if they wished to, because music and the domain of pleasure, rationally controlled, was absolutely necessary to maintaining the justice, equilibrium, health, and well-being of the body politic.

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28 Inayatullah "Kanbu," *Bahār-i Dānish*, ed. Qazi Fath Muhammad and Qazi Abdul Karim (n.p.: *Maṭba'-i Fath al-Karim*, 1885–1886), 148; *Bahar-i Danush*, vol. 3, trans. Jonathan Scott (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1799), 28–29. Scott's translation genders the human objects of desire female; the original does not.

29 Abu'l Fazl, *Ain i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann, vol. 1, p. 611.

30 Saif Khan "Faqirullah," *Tarjuma-i-Mānakutūhala & Risāla-i-Rāgadarpaṇa*, ed. and trans. Shahab Sarmadee (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts & Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 94–95, 192–193.

31 Nawwab Samsam-ud-daula Shah Nawaz Khan and 'Abdul Hayy, *The Maāthir-ul-Umarā*, vol. 2, trans. H. Beveridge and Baini Prashad (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1952), 685–686.

32 Mirza Muhammad Haidar "Dughlat," *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, trans. N. Elias and E. Denison Ross (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1895), 473. But for conflicting evidence, see Stewart Gordon, "Babur: Salt, Social Closeness and Friendship," *Studies*

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in History 33, no. 1 (2017): 82–97, at 94.

33 Schofield, *Music and Musicians*, 39–40.

34 Mirza Khan, *Tuḥfat*, 356–361.

35 Husain Waiz ul-Kashifi, *Anvar-i Suhailí*, trans. Edward B. Eastwick (Hertford, UK: Stephen Austin, 1854), 456.

36 Schofield, "Courtesan Tale."

37 Dawwani, *Akhlāq*, 309.

38 Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa'-i Dehlī*, ed. Khaliq Anjum (New Delhi: Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdu, 1993), 73–74.

39 Mirza Khan, *Tuḥfat*, 338–339.

40 Qazi Hasan bin Khwaja Tahir, *Sarūd al-Baḥr* [1663], Salar Jung Museum Library, Persian Mus 9, f. 3v.

41 Anon., *Mīrzānāma* [ca. 1660], British Library, Add. 16,819, 90v–91r.

42 Mirza Khan, *Tuḥfat*, 338–343; Faqirullah, *Rāg Darpan*, 160–171.

43 Anonymous member of the Mughal imperial *kalāwant* lineage, treatise on *Tāl* [1788], Edinburgh University Library, Or. MS 585, ff. 37–66, ff. 41r–v, 58r–v.

44 Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnamah*, vol. 2, ed. Maulawi 'Abd-ur-Rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1879), 136.

45 Ras Baras Khan, *Shams al-Asvāt* [1698], ed. and trans. Mehrdad Fallahzadeh (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012).

46 For a fuller technical explanation, Katherine Butler Schofield, "Music, Art, and Power in 'Adil Shahi Bijapur, c. 1570–1630," in *The Arts of the Deccan*, ed. Kavita Singh (Mumbai: Marg, 2018), 74–76.

47 E.g., Akbar's birth celebrations. See Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. 1, trans. H. Beveridge, Bibliotheca Indica Series (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press and Asiatic Society, 1897), 50–95.

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